

VZCZCXRO2871
PP RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHAR #0339/01 0721533
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 121533Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6258
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 000339

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [GH](#)
SUBJECT: GHANA ELECTORAL COMMISSION CONFRONTS OPPOSITION
CONCERNS OVER INFLATED VOTER REGISTER

REF: A. ACCRA 188

[1](#)B. ACCRA 325

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. In a February 29 meeting with Poloffs, Albert Kofi Arhin, Director of Elections for Ghana's Electoral Commission (EC), outlined the EC's revised schedule of activities in preparation for December presidential and parliamentary elections. The EC has scheduled nationwide voter ID replacement to begin March 14 and new voter registration for May, representing a one-month delay from previous plans. Poloff subsequently attended a March 4 meeting of the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC), an important EC-led forum for dispute resolution that had last met in May 2007. During the IPAC meeting, the EC refuted National Democratic Congress (NDC) allegations that voter registration numbers have been vastly overstated in New Patriotic Party (NPP) strongholds in the Ashanti region, and presented "official" data contradicting the NDC numbers. The EC and political parties agreed to a joint investigation into the data discrepancy. During March 6 Independence Day celebrations, President Kufuor appealed to the EC to continue its record of impartiality and transparency. The EC has also appealed to donor organizations to fill a USD 12 million funding gap, despite previous indications that the GOG would fully fund the 2008 Elections. END SUMMARY.

Voter Registration and ID Replacement Scheduled

[1](#)2. (U) POL Chief met February 29 with Albert Kofi Arhin, Director of Elections at the Electoral Commission, to discuss preparations for the December presidential and parliamentary elections. Arhin presented the EC's updated schedule of activities, indicating that the EC will begin replacing lost and damaged voter ID cards on March 14. The exercise will occur at the district level, covering approximately 5,000 polling stations. The EC plans to dispatch "mobile units" in larger geographic areas to access a broader section of the population. The EC will also pay particular attention to the northern regions, where they expect a higher than average number of replacement requests due to last year's flooding and property damage.

[1](#)3. (U) Arhin stated that new voter registration is scheduled for May 8-17. This represents a one-month delay from previous EC plans (see Ref A). The EC said it expects approximately one million new registration requests this year, based on a review of census data (citizens are eligible to vote at age 18) and an estimate of first-time registrants.

(NOTE: The last voter registration drive occurred in 2006, despite a constitutional requirement for annual registration, and added approximately 600,000 new voters to the register. END NOTE)

IPAC Revived, Voters Register Discrepancies Addressed

¶4. (SBU) On March 4, the Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) assembled after a 10-month period of inactivity. Convened by the EC, the meeting was attended by representatives from all major political parties as well as representatives from Ghana's development partners (including Poloff). (NOTE: The United Renaissance Party (URP) boycotted the March 4 meeting on the basis of foreign donor presence. END NOTE) During the meeting, EC Chairman Dr. K. Afari-Gyan presented the commission's schedule of activities for the coming months, outlined the EC's approach to voter ID replacement in March, and responded to NDC allegations of irregularities in Ashanti region voter registers. Afari-Gyan presented a summary of Ashanti voter registration numbers to IPAC attendees, with data showing that growth in Ashanti voter registration averaged 6% in 2006, consistent with national averages.

¶5. (SBU) (NOTE: On March 4, a pro-NDC newspaper published allegations of voter registration irregularities and accused the NPP of vote rigging. Using data reportedly obtained from the EC, the NDC calculated that 13 constituencies in Ashanti (a NPP stronghold) witnessed more than 100% growth in registered voters between 2004 and 2006, while increases in the remaining 217 Ghanaian districts averaged only 5.5%. The NDC presented similar allegations to Poloff in a February 27 meeting. The NDC stated that the EC provided the data on a CD-ROM following a formal NDC request last year. END NOTE)

¶6. (SBU) Afari-Gyan emphasized that the EC figures represent "authentic data" from the official EC voter register. It is unclear why the data presented by the NDC differs significantly from the official EC numbers and whether the data discrepancy occurred on the EC or NDC side. Following heated debate among the political parties, the EC agreed to

ACCRA 00000339 002 OF 002

cooperate with the political parties to investigate the discrepancy.

President Kufuor Urges EC Neutrality, Transparency

¶7. (U) In his March 6 Independence Day speech, President Kufuor expressed confidence in the EC's integrity but urged the EC to manage upcoming elections "with impartiality, neutrality, and transparent honesty" to ensure that results are respected by political parties and all Ghanaians. Kufuor also appealed to political parties and citizens to assume responsibility for a peaceful election process.

EC Budget Shortfall Projected

¶8. (SBU) The EC and Ministry of Finance have reported a USD 12 million budget shortfall this year and, in February, approached donors to fill the government's financing gap. This request came despite indications to development partners in 2007 that the GOG would fully fund the Electoral Commission for the 2008 polls. (Ref B). Preparations for the December elections are somewhat behind schedule relative to past election years. However, the EC claims budgetary considerations have not hindered operations to-date, despite delays in ID replacement and registration activities.

¶9. (SBU) COMMENT. The EC has commanded widespread respect from political parties, civil society organizations, and the Ghanaian public. However, in several key areas of preparation for the 2008 elections, the EC has fallen short, including unexplained delays in launching election registration activities, and its limited communications with political parties. For example, the important decision not to implement the controversial overseas voting law was announced in the press before it was communicated to political parties. Nevertheless, the EC's leadership appears accessible to addressing requests and concerns from the

parties, and the long-overdue resumption of regular IPAC meetings will demonstrate the strength of this commitment, providing a critical forum to address inter-party problems and a key channel for communications during an expectedly contentious campaign. END COMMENT
BRIDGEWATER